

Review of 'Genre Pedagogy in Higher Education: The SLATE Project. S.J. Drefus, S. Humphrey, A. Mahboob and J.R. Martin. Palgrave Macmillan (2016)

Gardner, S

Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Gardner, S 2017, 'Review of 'Genre Pedagogy in Higher Education: The SLATE Project. S.J. Drefus, S. Humphrey, A. Mahboob and J.R. Martin. Palgrave Macmillan (2016)' *System* , vol 68, pp. 96-98

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.06.008>

DOI 10.1016/j.system.2017.06.008

ISSN 0346-251X

Publisher: Elsevier

NOTICE: this is the author's version of a work that was accepted for publication in *System*. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as peer review, editing, corrections, structural formatting, and other quality control mechanisms may not be reflected in this document. Changes may have been made to this work since it was submitted for publication. A definitive version was subsequently published in *System*, [68, (2017)] DOI: 10.1016/j.system.2017.06.008

© 2017, Elsevier. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

TITLE PAGE

Book Review

Review of

**Genre Pedagogy in Higher Education: The SLATE Project,
Shoshana J. Dreyfus, Sally Humphrey, Ahmar Mahboob and
J.R. Martin. Palgrave Macmillan (2016). xv + 298pp.**

Reviewer:

Sheena Gardner

Professor of Applied Linguistics

School of Humanities

Coventry University

Coventry CV1 5FB, UK

sheena.gardner@coventry.ac.uk

Review

Genre Pedagogy in Higher Education: The SLATE Project, Shoshana J. Dreyfus, Sally Humphrey, Ahmar Mahboob and J.R. Martin. Palgrave Macmillan (2016). xv + 298pp.

As a Systemic Functional educational linguist with a particular interest in genres across the disciplines in Higher Education, I have been aware of the SLATE project over recent years and was keen to find out more – about the contribution to our understanding and theory, but also about what was achieved in practice. The **Sydney School genre pedagogy** originated in primary schools in the 1980s where differences between narrative and factual genres emerged as critical; it developed through the Write it Right project in the 1990s to take account of learner pathways and genre mapping in subject specialisms such as History, English and Science in secondary schools; and it has now with the **Scaffolding Literacy in Academic and Tertiary Education (SLATE)** project moved into online international university education. Here, as in other sectors, the Sydney School has made a distinctive contribution.

The **SLATE action research project** (2008-10) was launched at the University of Sydney to provide online support for undergraduate students at the City University of Hong Kong (CityU). The blurb of this volume claims that it can ‘serve the needs of researchers and practitioners engaged with the literacy development of tertiary students in both English speaking and non-English speaking countries’, but its main contribution is to bring together chapters on the theoretical foundations of genre and register analysis and the Sydney School genre based Teaching Learning Cycle, with the curriculum planning and tutor training involved in implementing a genre pedagogy in two undergraduate courses (Linguistics and Biology at CityU), and insights into the realities of online tutoring at a distance. It thus provides an overview of the project, a benchmark for what can be achieved, and points to further publications (notably those in *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* volume 7, 2013).

The scope of the volume is therefore vast. Following an introduction to the project and the book (Chapter One), Chapters Two and Three provide clear introductions to the **Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory of Language in Context** (Chapter Two) and how the main lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic systems can be analysed in meaning making (Chapter Three). Chapter Two introduces the central

SFL concepts of stratification, metafunction, axis, register and genre. It is illustrated through an extract from *Meme Wars*, which itself perhaps is misleading for the volume as, although it is from an academic context, it is an advocacy document addressed to economics students that includes many of the features that later chapters (e.g. p.136) suggest be avoided in academic writing (e.g. contractions, informal language, phrasal verbs and questions). Nevertheless, it is engaging, and introduces the top-down nature of SFL analysis that is a recurring and important theme throughout the volume. It also points to a range of further reading (p. 40) that includes more complex and more accessible accounts of SFL register and genre theory.

The potential reach of SFL beyond the project is also apparent in Chapter Three, which demonstrates analysis of the lexicogrammar (clause, group, phrase analysis and grammatical metaphor) and discourse semantics (information flow, conjunction, participant tracking, lexical relations and appraisal) of a text by Ridenhour (a whistleblower from the Vietnam war) that History students might read as a source text. Its less abstract and less technical nature is justified (p.43) in that it makes visible a broader range of features than the biology and linguistics texts that are the focus of the SLATE project. This chapter also concludes with further reading.

A more practical framework developed to highlight key SFL categories for teachers and students is presented in Chapter Three. **The 3x3 framework** is used to analyse academic genres in the SLATE project, and to develop 3x3 generic and genre-specific assessment rubrics. Basically the framework presents the three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual) on the y-axis and three text levels on the x-axis: Genre & Register (whole text), Discourse Semantics (phase/paragraph) and Lexicogrammar (clause, group and word). It is well illustrated through a factorial explanation from Sports Science and a critical review from Sociology, both of which were written by CityU students. The appendices to this chapter provide detailed materials that could be more widely applied, while the notes explain that by 2012 the framework had been expanded to a 4x4 model for secondary school use.

At the heart of genre-based pedagogy is the **Teaching Learning Cycle** (TLC) that moves a lesson from building field and deconstruction, through negotiated construction to independent construction. It is introduced in Chapter Five, which also discusses the challenges in implementing a genre based literacy programme in an online context.

My favourite chapter is probably Chapter Six. Although I was at times confused by some of the simplifications and developing terminologies, the **genre analysis** of student assignments **in Linguistics**, together with the importance of the ‘nub’ in making a point, demonstrate fully the value of an SFL genre analysis as a basis for literacy development in tertiary education. A slightly different approach to texts **in Biology** is taken in Chapter Seven. It includes a classification of research articles (as texts that Biology students read), introduces the concepts of **burnishing and tarnishing in ‘coupling’**, and analyses undergraduate lab report genres. The genre analyses in these two chapters provide the basis for the online support, but each could be read in isolation by teachers or researchers working in these two disciplines.

As a teacher educator in the UK and consultant for genre and discipline-focused online EAP (English for Academic Purposes) projects in HE in Hong Kong, I enjoyed the next four chapters for the insights they provided into the practicalities of implementation. I don’t think the rationale for the overall design is ever fully explained, but there is plenty of practical detail that others engaged in HE, and in particularly in online EAP, could take on board.

The four workshops in the **tutor training programme** delivered to the 40 tutors employed as language coaches are outlined in Chapter Eight. This is an ambitious programme for tutors with a range of experience and expertise. We gain some lovely insights into training techniques (including texts used) and the pedagogy espoused (the importance of building a relationship, of offering specific, focused feedback). The ‘top down’ theme (working from context, task and genre to lexicogrammar) and the ‘front-loading’ pedagogy (where teaching precedes evaluation, and the final product is negotiated in progress) are both appropriately emphasised. There is probably much more that could be learned from these workshops, from simple details such as how long they were, to how they were received, and what changes might be made if they were offered again.

The implementation is then discussed through deconstruction (Chapter Nine), joint construction (Chapter Ten) and independent construction (Chapter Eleven). The SLATE project was integrated into CityU courses through specific **reading support, leading to specific assignment support**, as explained in Chapter Nine. Examples (pp. 235-238) are given from Biology, where **materials** are underpinned by a developmental pathway from first and second year lab reports to final year research

reports. They make explicit the phases (aka moves) expected in lab report introductions and provide illustrative excerpts from student writing. These materials are well designed, and it would be good to know how they were received by content lecturers and students.

I was initially surprised to discover that it was tutors in Australia who engaged in **synchronous joint construction activities online** with students in Hong Kong. Lesson extracts show communication by typing. While this takes longer (as does getting the class started), and various permutations were experimented with to 'fit' 20 students in one tutorial hour, one affordance hypothesised was the readiness of the Chinese students to ask questions online. This is presented as a labour intensive, logistically challenging part of the project, and we are told later that not all students engaged in joint construction (p.263).

Following joint construction in the teaching learning cycle is the **independent construction** phase, which is presented in Chapter Eleven with a specific focus on feedback. The skeleton for this chapter is a series of **feedback frameworks** – for the stage of the feedback (starting with a 'purr' or greeting and positive comment), the type of feedback (how explicit and how much rationale), and the focus of feedback (e.g. lexicogrammar). These are exemplified, as is the scope they afford for supporting writing during the independent construction phase.

The **achievements of the SLATE Project** are highlighted in Chapter Twelve: the development of a top-down, front-loaded, and embedded genre-based literacy programme that developed reading into writing skills in two specific disciplinary course contexts through online tutoring. Instrumental in this development were new genre descriptions for linguistics and biology and a tutor training package based around the 3x3 rubric. As a project, this represents a significant contribution to the field in terms of what is possible. We are left wondering, however, about how practical it is. Is joint construction a necessary step in HE or can university teachers and students skip it with impunity? How was the programme received by CityU and what are the next steps? With funding and the will, such a programme could be rolled out across the university, and since 2010 a new four-year undergraduate curriculum has been introduced in Hong Kong with scope for enhanced literacy provision. Yet the employment of 40 tutors in Australia to tutor students in Hong Kong would be an unusual model, notwithstanding the two postdoctoral appointments in Hong Kong that facilitated the genre analyses of linguistics and biology.

I found the book very **readable**. It is generally well written, with good use of figures and tables. I was vaguely confused in places where CityU texts not from the target programmes were introduced (e.g. Sociology and Sports Science in Chapter 4), or where different terms were used to refer to the 'same' features (e.g. use of phase/ stage 'the level of stage p. 156), or the same term used with different meanings (e.g. 'move' to mean something different from Swales' use of 'move' p. 155) and 'exemplifying report' or 'instantiated concept report' (Chapter 6). Some of the visuals took more work than others to decode perhaps because of errors (Table 6.1?) or lack of colour/ unclear formatting (Figure 8.3), but most of the proofreading errors of form seem to be in the References.

Although the book is multiple authored, the **contributions of the different authors** (p.xiv) can be discerned and demonstrate the breadth of expertise in the team. Mahboob provides the applicable linguistics/ TESOL framing (Chapters One, Eleven and Twelve), Martin (Chapters Two and Three) provides the distinctive Sydney School linguistics foundations; Humphrey demonstrates the application of theory to practice in the development of the 3x3 framework, while Dreyfoos's contribution is more evident in the investigations of the joint construction phase of the teaching learning cycle. The authors build on school genre descriptions and pedagogy from Sydney, and as such the volume is inward looking. It does not engage with insights from other higher education projects within the SFL family, such as the accounts of genres across disciplines in the UK (Nesi and Gardner 2012) or the LASS approach to semiotic mediation in teaching and learning (Coffin and Donohue 2014).

Conversely, although there are links between the chapters, the book does not present a comprehensive overview of the project. There is, for instance, little sense of timescale, of pilots, of the data collected, consultations pre and post analysis with academic staff at CityU, of uptake, of evaluations of the materials, the teacher training, the online tutoring etc. What it does present is a series of touchstones across the development of the project, and I would positively recommend it as such. Each chapter forms a relatively independent piece and could usefully, for instance, be given as a reading on MA courses or in teacher development programmes. I don't anticipate reading this book again, cover to cover, but now with an appreciation of the contributions of the different chapters, I do envisage returning to specific chapters and, with that more specific focus, gaining further understanding of theoretical frameworks and how they were applied in the SLATE project.

Sheena Gardner

sheena.gardner@coventry.ac.uk

References

Coffin, C. and Donohue, J. (2014) *A Language as Social Semiotic-Based Approach to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Nesi, H. and Gardner, S. (2012) *Genres across the Disciplines: Student Writing in Higher Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.